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(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TREATING A STEEL ARTICLE**

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(60) Provisional application No. 61/661,540, filed on Jun. 19, 2012.

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C22C 38/04 (2006.01)
C22C 38/02 (2006.01)

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USPC 148/529, 575, 663
See application file for complete search history.

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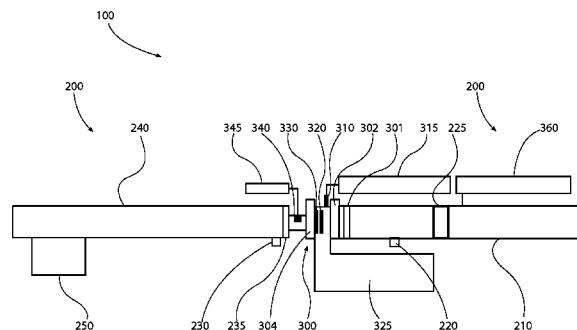
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method for forming and treating a steel article of a high strength and ductile alloy. The method includes the steps of providing a starting steel composition for the steel article, preheating the composition, heating the starting material to a peak temperature range in less than forty seconds, holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds, quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of 200 to 3000 ° C./sec (360 and 5400° F./sec), removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition, tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature of 100 to 704° C. (212 to 1300° F.); and air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel having desired mechanical properties.

37 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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 (2013.01); *C21D 9/505* (2013.01); *C22C 38/02*
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 (2013.01); *B23K 2201/16* (2013.01); *B23K*
2201/18 (2013.01); *B23K 2203/04* (2013.01);
C21D 2211/008 (2013.01); *Y02P 10/253*
 (2015.11)

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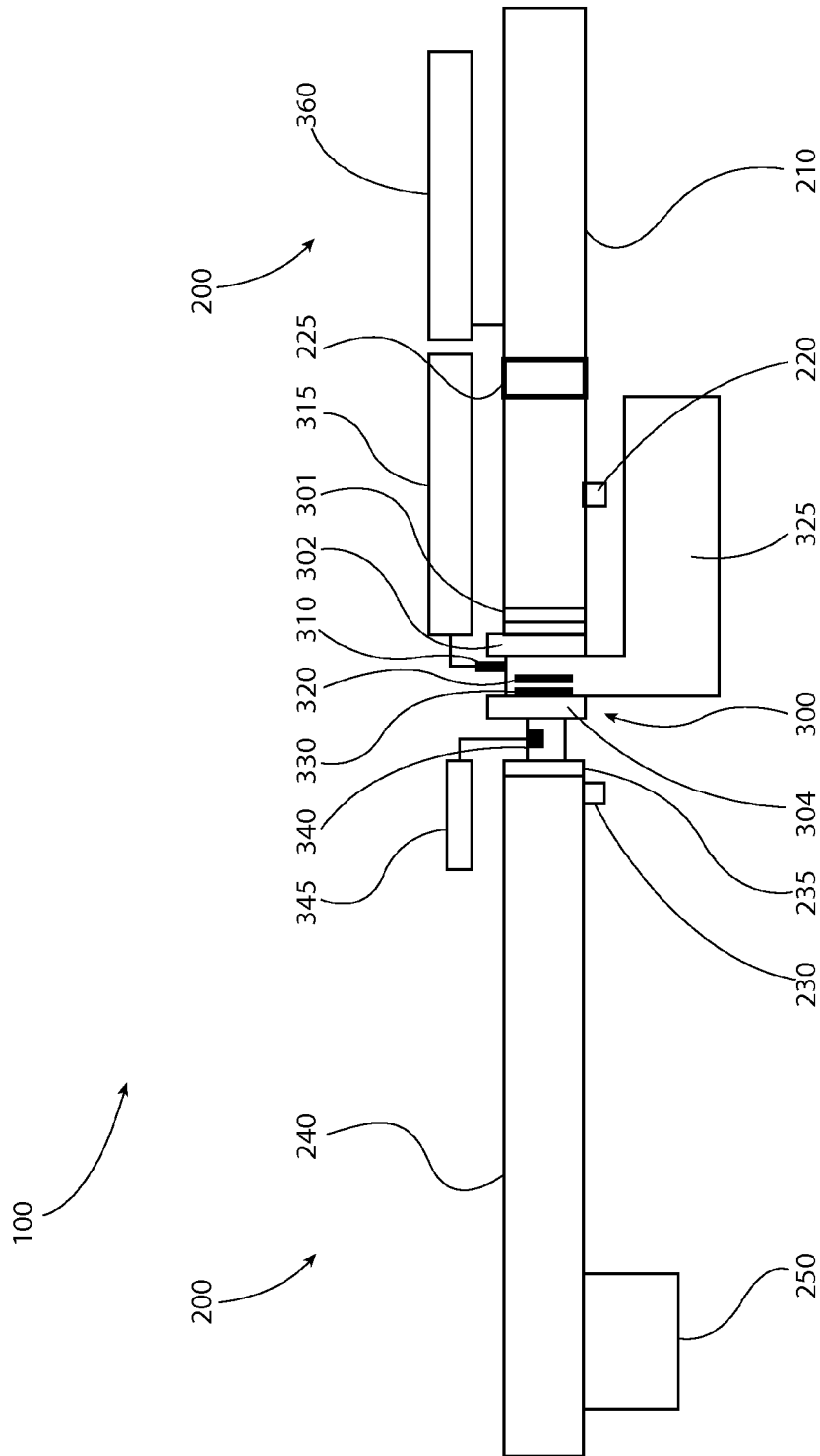


FIG. 1

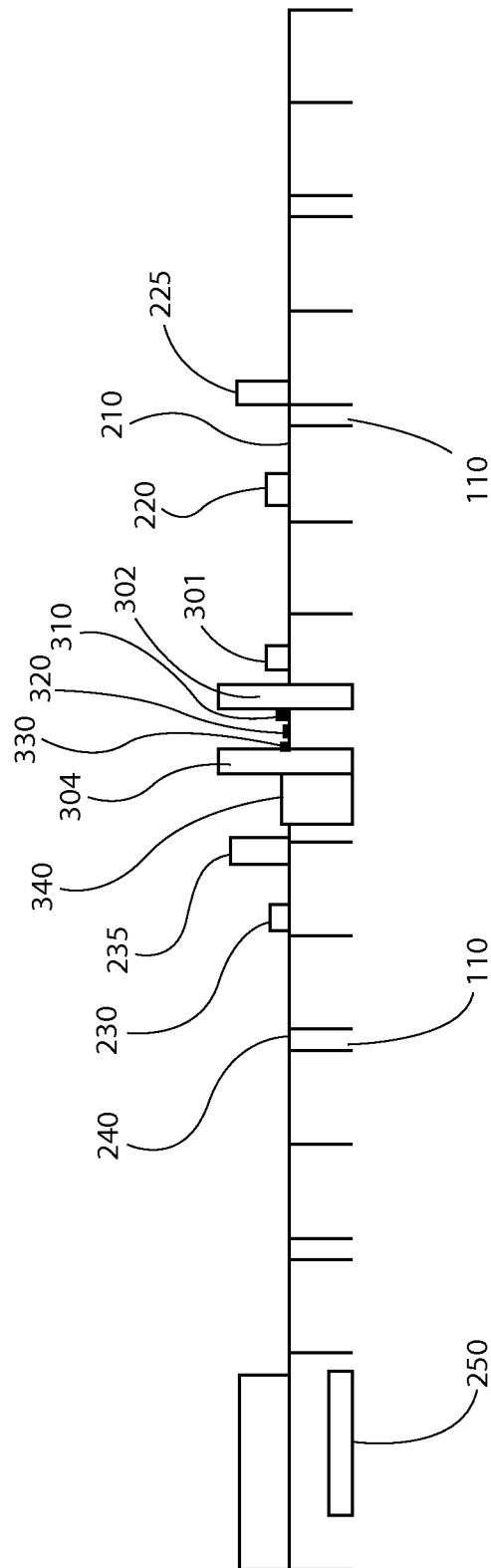


FIG. 2

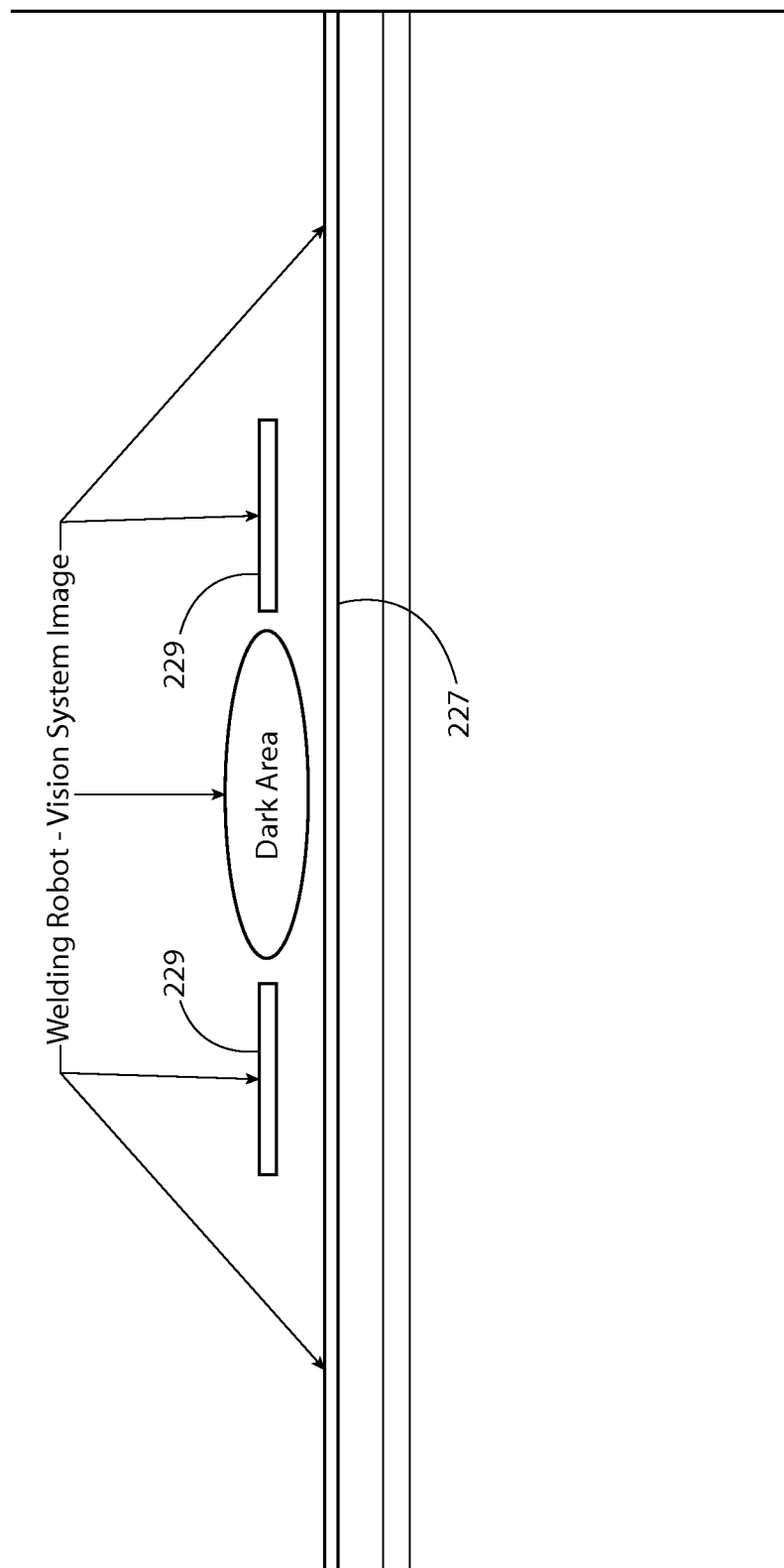


FIG. 3

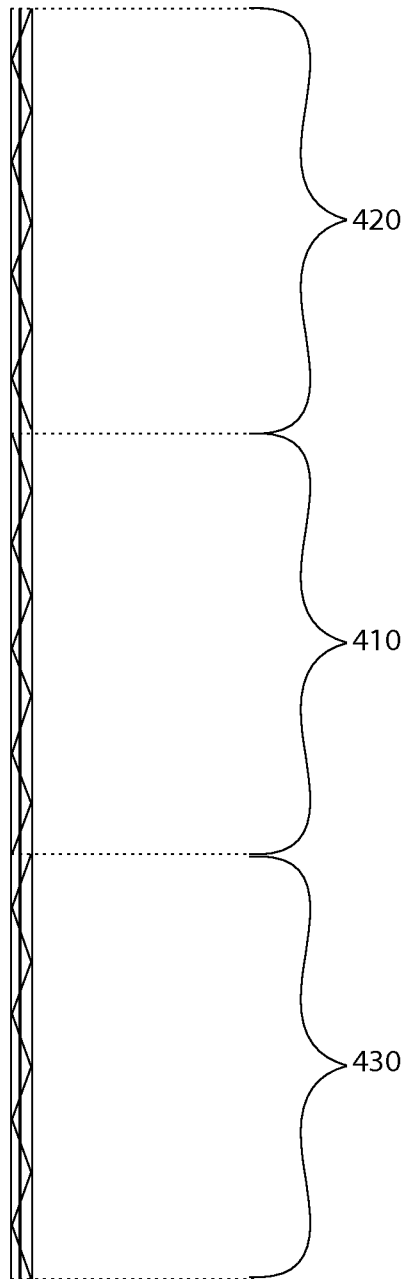


FIG. 4

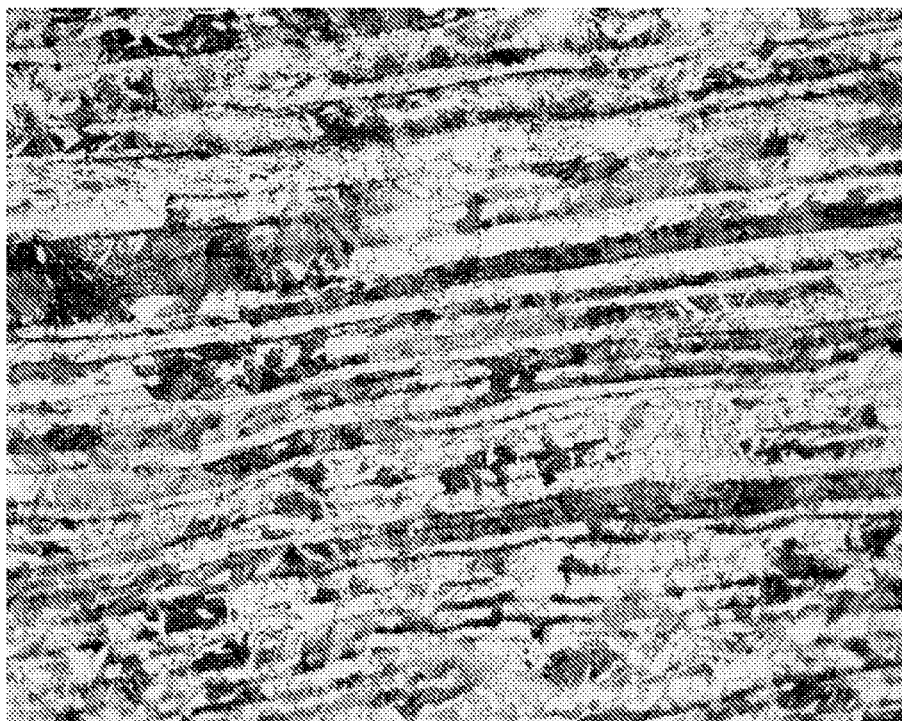


FIG. 5

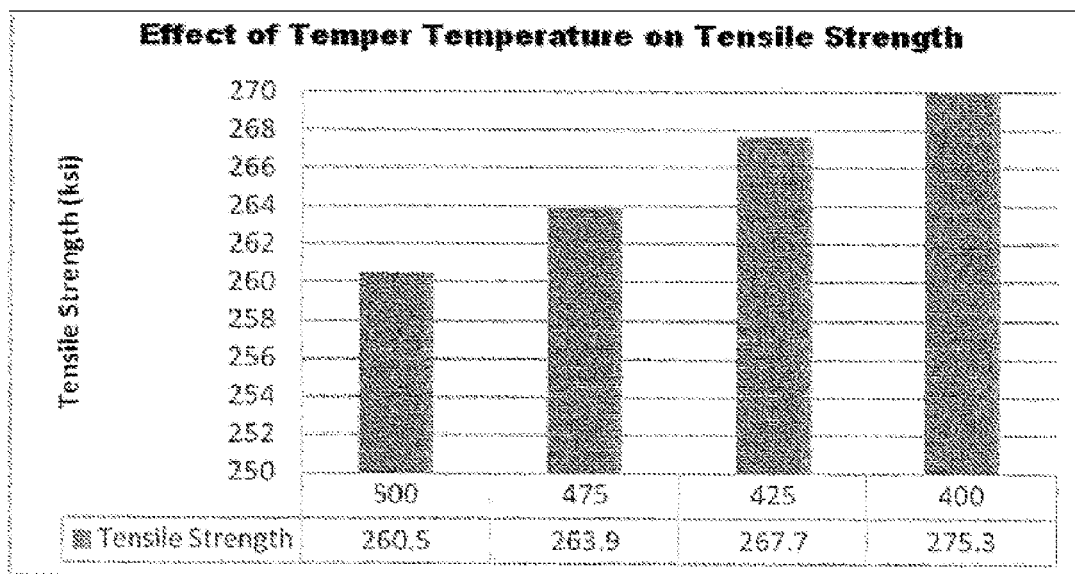
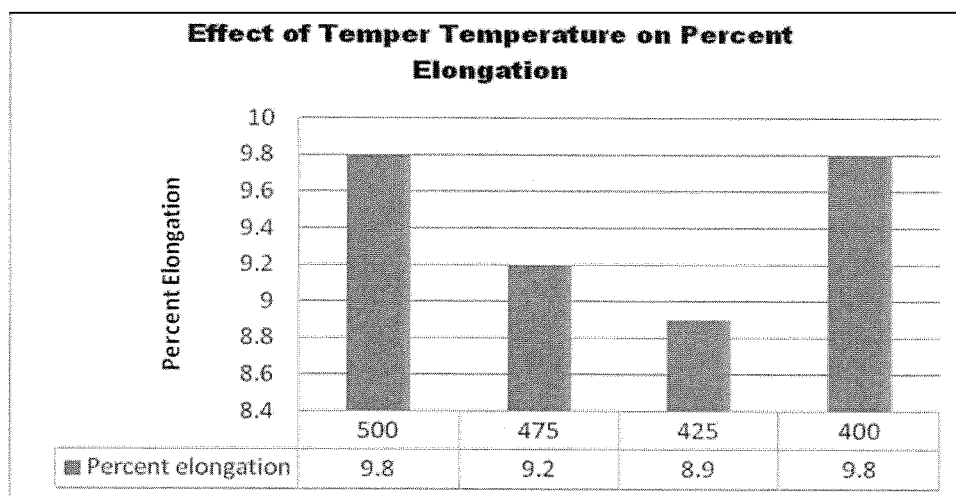
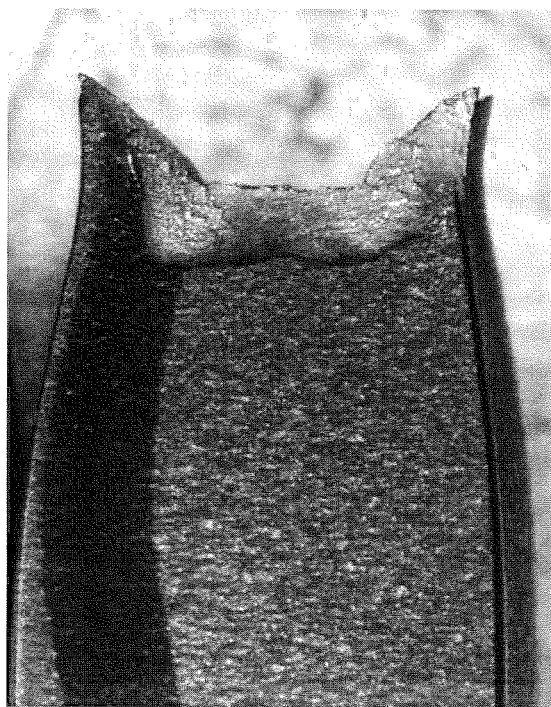
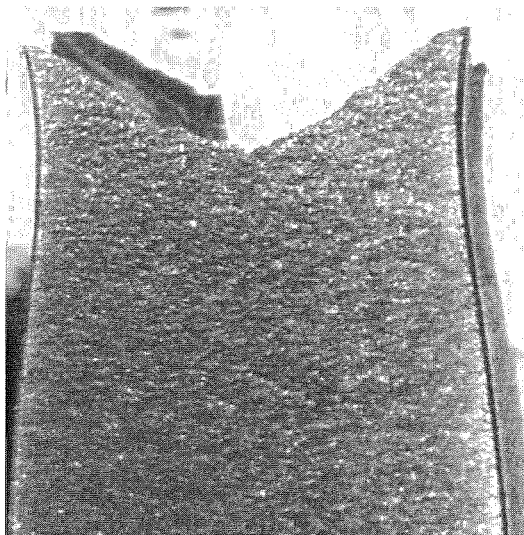
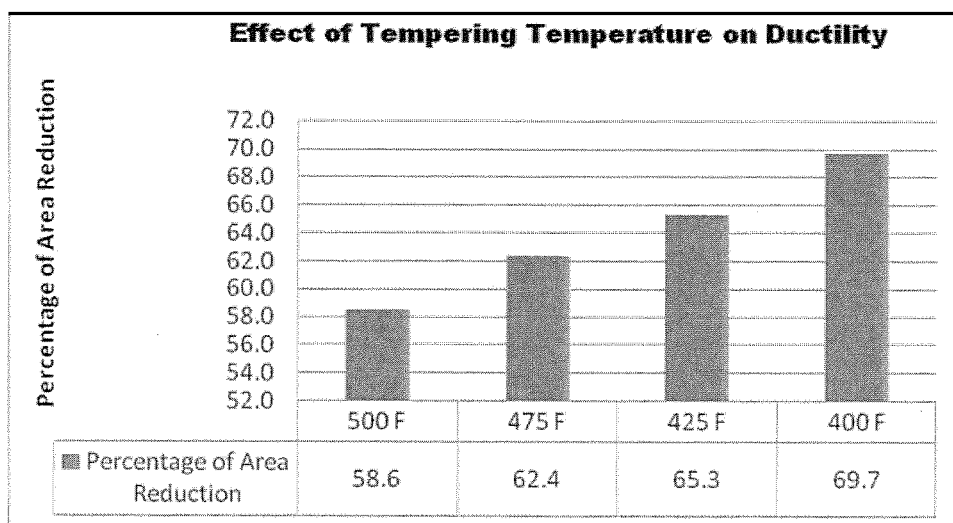


FIG. 6

**FIG. 7****FIG. 8**

**FIG. 9****FIG. 10**

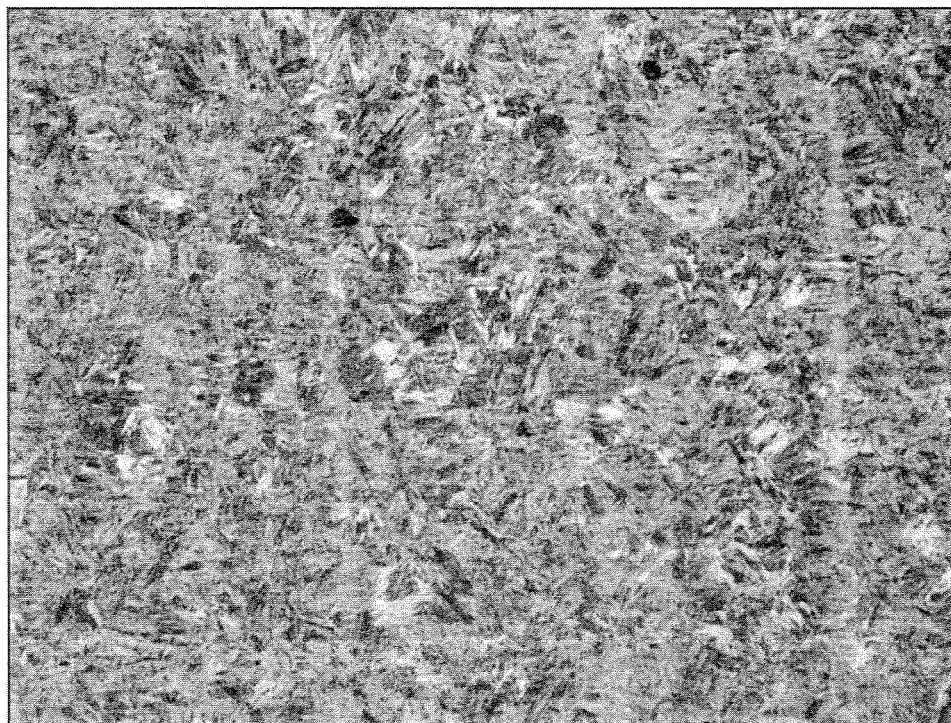


FIG. 11

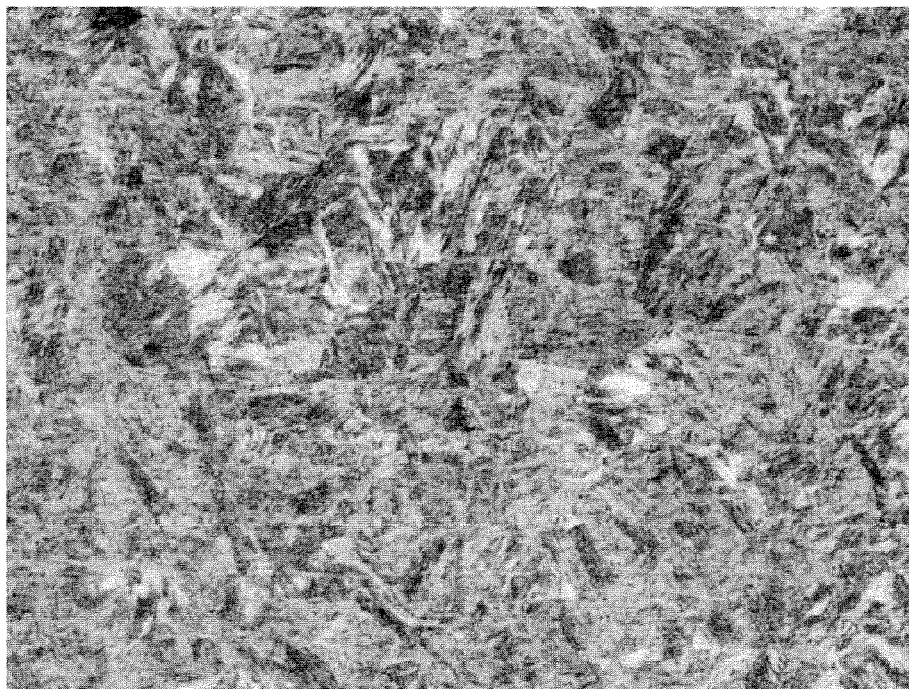


FIG. 12

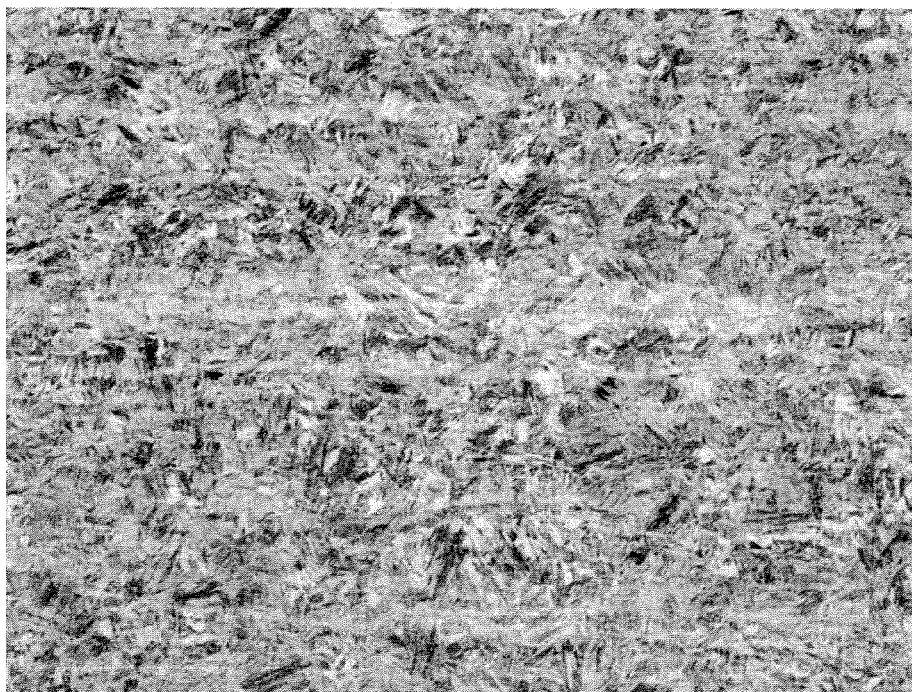


FIG. 13



FIG. 14

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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TREATING A STEEL ARTICLE

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part of and claims priority to U.S. Pat. No. 8,894,781, issued Nov. 25, 2014, which is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/838,693, filed Mar. 15, 2013, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/661,540, filed Jun. 19, 2012. The contents of the foregoing applications are incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

This invention relates to the heat treatment of steel articles, and in particular relates to induction heating, quenching, and tempering of steel sheets.

In order to improve the mechanical properties of metal articles, metal is typically subjected to time consuming, and therefore costly, heat treatment processes. To increase the hardness of a steel, a steel article may be subjected to a heating cycle at or above a temperature of the metal's critical temperature, followed by quenching the metal article. This process typically results in creation of a martensitic microstructure in steels. Martensitic microstructures, while relatively hard, are also known to be relatively brittle, and with less ductility. To increase the ductility of martensitic microstructures, such steels are often tempered, or heated to a temperature below the steel's critical temperature, whereby stresses built up in the steel during quenching are reduced. Such heating, quenching, and tempering processes are typically long to conduct, and accordingly, expensive.

In processing steel generally, and, more specifically, in forming anti-ballistic armor, it has until now been difficult to achieve a metal product having a combination of strength and ductility which could be manufactured without high cost, including extensive heat treatment time. For example, such a metal article should be able to resist penetration by armor piercing ammunition as well as fragments from improvised explosive devices, including explosively formed projectiles. We have found a method and apparatus for heat treating, quenching, and tempering a steel article whereby the article has desirable mechanical and microstructure properties, including properties which may be useful in acting as anti-ballistic armor or in other applications which may require a steel sheet having high hardness in combination with high ductility.

Disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,
phosphorus less than 0.035%, and
balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

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(c) heating the provided steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 117° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature from 100° C. to 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes;

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

The air cooled steel composition may have a microstructure with no more than 1% bainite, by weight.

Alternatively, disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,
phosphorus less than 0.035%, and
balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition; and

(g) air cooling the steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

Also disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,

phosphorus less than 0.035%, and
balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 815° C. (1500° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature between 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a microstructure with no more than 1% bainite by weight.

Alternatively, disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,
phosphorus less than 0.035%,

balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to a temperature to not more than 815° C. (1500° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 100° C. (212° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature from 100° C. to 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

Alternatively, the air cooled steel composition has a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle of at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a microstructure with no more than 1% bainite by weight.

Alternatively, disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,
phosphorus less than 0.035%,

balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature from 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

The air cooled steel composition may have a microstructure with no more than 1% bainite by weight.

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

The steel composition may be heated in step (c) in less than twenty seconds. Further, the heated steel composition may be held at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds. Further, the heated steel composition may be quenched from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec). Further, the residual quench media may be removed from the surface of the quenched steel

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composition by at least one of mechanical wiping, blown air, and combinations thereof. Alternatively, the tempering step is performed using a conventional oven. The tempering step may be performed using a combination of conventional oven and induction heater. Additionally, the tempering step may be performed at between 100° C. (212° F.) and 704° C. (1300° F.).

Alternatively disclosed is a method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inch (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,

silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,

manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,

chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,

nickel less than 4.5%,

molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,

sulfur less than 0.040%,

phosphorus less than 0.035%,

balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition; and

(h) air cooling the steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

In any of the embodiments, prior to heating the steel composition, two or more lengths of steel plates may be welded together along the width with one or more welds to form a continuous series of steel plates. Further, the step of welding may include applying a weave weld bridging between lengths of steel plate across the width of the steel plates. Further, the step of welding may include applying a weave weld bridging between lengths of steel plate in three sections where the center portion of steel plate is done first and the side portions are welded to provide a weave weld across the width of the steel plates. In any event, a seam weld is applied over the weave weld across the width of the steel plates. Further, an indicia may be applied to the steel plate in advance of the welding step to enable a vision system to identify the location of end portions of lengths of the steel plates for the welding step.

The heating step may be performed using an induction heater. The quenching step may be performed by flowing a quench medium over the steel article at a rate of up to 900 gallons/min (3400 L/min). The quench medium may be water. The quenching step may be performed in more than 1 second and not more than 20 seconds. After the quenching step, the steel plate is cut into lengths at least at the seams while the steel plate continuously moves along the conveyor.

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The tempering step may also be performed using an induction heater. The tempering step may be performed at between 100° C. (212° F.) and 704° C. (1300° F.) in a time between 1 and 20 seconds.

Additionally, the steel composition may have, by weight, carbon between 0.25 and 0.40%. Alternatively, the carbon composition may be between 0.40 and 0.55%.

Additionally, the air cooled steel composition may have a microstructure having no more than 1% bainite by weight.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagrammatical plan view of the heat treatment system of the present disclosure,

FIG. 2 is a diagrammatical side view of the heat treatment system of FIG. 1,

FIG. 3 is a plan view of the pattern marked on a steel article to be treated for detection by a vision system;

FIG. 4 is a plan view of a welding pattern used for joining steel articles to be treated by the disclosed method;

FIG. 5 is a photomicrograph showing the microstructure of a steel article prior to treatment according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 6 is a chart showing the effect of post-quench tempering temperature on tensile strength on a steel article treated according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 7 is a chart showing the effect of post-quench tempering temperature on percent elongation on a steel article treated according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 8 is a photograph showing a cross-section of a steel article treated according to the disclosed method following fracture in a tensile test;

FIG. 9 is a photograph showing a cross-section of another steel article treated according to the disclosed method following fracture in a tensile test;

FIG. 10 is a chart showing the effect of post-quench tempering temperature on ductility on a steel article treated according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 11 is a photomicrograph showing the microstructure of a steel article treated according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 12 is a photomicrograph showing the microstructure of a steel article treated according to the disclosed method;

FIG. 13 is a photomicrograph showing the microstructure of a steel article treated according to the disclosed method; and

FIG. 14 is a photomicrograph showing the microstructure of a steel article treated according to the disclosed method.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present method is directed to an induction heated, quenched, and induction tempered steel article and a method of making such a steel article. The starting material for the steel article has a composition comprising carbon in a range from about 0.25% by weight to about 0.55% by weight, silicon in a range from about 0.15% by weight to about 0.35% by weight, manganese in a range from about 0.40% by weight to about 1.0% by weight, chromium from about 0.40% by weight to about 1.10% by weight, nickel less than 4.5% by weight, molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35% by weight, sulfur less than 0.040% by weight, phosphorus less than 0.035% by weight, with the balance of the composition comprising iron and other elements and compounds in making steel. This balance may include impurities and other ingredients, for example from steel scrap or wire, in making steel. Additionally, the steel article may have carbon in a range from about 0.25% by weight to about 0.44% by weight and man-

ganese in a range from about 0.40% by weight to about 0.60% by weight, the other components having the same composition ranges. Steel material having this composition may be referred to as AISI steel grade 4130. Alternatively, the steel article may have carbon in a range from about 0.40% by weight to about 0.55% by weight and manganese in a range from about 0.75% by weight to about 1.00% by weight, the other components having the same composition ranges. Steel material having this composition may be referred to as AISI steel grade 4140. Stated in terms of commercial grades, AISI steel grades from the 10XX family such as 1020, 1030, 1040 and 1050, the 41XX family such as 4130 and 4150, the 43XX (family such as 4340, and the 86XX (family such as 8630 and 8640 may be used. Further, as described above, higher carbon steel grades, such as ultra hard steel having up to 0.55% carbon, may be used with the described invention.

Referring now to FIGS. 1 and 2, a heat treatment system 100 is illustrated that comprises a main machine frame 110 supported from a factory floor and supporting a discontinuous conveyor 200. The conveyor 200 includes an entrance conveyor 210, where a starting material for a steel article to be treated by the system 100 is loaded, and an exit conveyor 240, where treated steel articles are removed from the system and stacked at stacker 250. The entrance conveyor 210 and the exit conveyor 240 are aligned and spaced apart so as to accommodate the provision of a heat treatment unit 300 in line between the two conveyors 210, 240. The starting material for the steel article is initially provided in the as-cast or as-rolled condition and may be subjected to spheroidized or non-spheroidized annealing heat treatment. When non-spheroidized, the initial material microstructure of the starting material for steel article may have a non-annealed microstructure and may have at least 90-97% ferrite and 2-10% pearlite, by weight, as shown in FIG. 5. Depending on the method of manufacturing of the steel article, the initial microstructure may have a banded structure consistent with rolling.

Accordingly, a starting material for a steel article to be treated may be loaded at the entrance conveyor 210, processed by the heat treatment unit 300, transited down the exit conveyor 240, and stacked by the stacker 250, in a continuous process. This linear alignment of the conveyors 210, 240 and the heat treatment unit 300 facilitates rapid heat treatment of steel sheet, slab, and plate.

In operation, a starting material for the steel article to be treated, which may be provided, for example in the form of a sheet or plate, is loaded onto the entrance conveyor 210. The method is described in terms of processing a steel plate to form the steel article, but the form of the starting material in other forms, including without limitation steel slabs and steel sheet, as well as coiled product. In one instance, a starting material for the steel plate has a thickness of 0.50 inches (12.7 mm) or less, a length of 20 feet (6.1 m), and a width of 4 feet (1.2 m). The steel plate then begins to transit horizontally along the length of the entrance conveyor 210 toward the heat treatment unit 300. Once the steel plate has moved a distance approximate to its length, for example 20 feet (6.1 m), down the entrance conveyor 210, another steel plate is loaded on the entrance conveyor with the leading edge portions of that steel plate abutting the trailing edge portions of the first loaded steel plate. This process of advancement and loading of abutting steel plates may be carried out continuously so as to provide an uninterrupted run of steel plates to the heat treatment unit 300. So as to minimize inconsistent alignment from plate to plate through the system 100, an automated welder 220 may be provided on the entrance conveyor 210 and utilized to weld consecutive, abutting steel plates together along their width to form a continuous series of steel plates. The

welds may be evenly spaced along the width of the steel plates, and in one instance, the welder may make five welds along the width of the steel plates. Alternatively, instead of the form of individual plates having fixed width and length, the starting material to be treated may be provided in the form of a continuous sheet (e.g. a coil) located in line with the entrance conveyor 210 and fed continuously onto the entrance conveyor for subsequent treatment by the heat treatment unit 300.

The steel plates may be in continuous motion at a substantially constant speed along the conveyor 210 to facilitate the heating and quenching processes. Welding the steel plates together as they contact on the conveyor 210 prevents the steel plate from shifting position or overlapping each other as they move down the conveyor. This allows a vision system 225 and welding robot 220 to provide a consistent weld joint between lengths of steel plates. It also limits imperfections in the steel plate going through drive pinch rolls 302 and 304, which assists to maintain line speed as the welded seams move through the pinch rolls. Initial welding also allows the system to bridge gaps at the seam between lengths of steel plates, further improving the welding robot weld process.

The vision system 225 for the welding robot may identify an indicia pattern of lines applied to or placed adjacent to the trailing edge of each steel plate, which may, for example, include a line 227 drawn across the full width of the steel plate with two spaced apart smaller lines 229 substantially parallel to that line, and a dark area between spaced apart lines. This is an example of a pattern of indicia that enables for correct position of lengths of steel plates to be recognized by the vision system 225. Once the vision system 225 detects the indicia, it begins counting to signal the welding robot 220 to start the programmed weld process once the steel plate lengths are within the work area. FIG. 3 illustrates the indicia recognized by the welding robot vision system 225. The vision system 235 for the plasma cutting robot 230 may recognize a position for a welded seam across the full width of the steel plate. The scores and emphasis area of indicia is specific to avoid stray lines on the steel plate to be picked up and mistaken for a weld area. If that were to occur, the plasma cutting robot 230 may cut at that stray lines and disrupt the steel lengths through the system until the next seam is detected.

The welding robot 220 may have a multiple pass program that is triggered by the vision system 225 and encoder wheel that counts distance travelled in millimeters tracking along the conveyor 200, to engage a weld program once the seam is within the robot work area. The robot work area is based on points that are taught or touched on within the welding program. The weld program may utilize three (3) separate welding weave patterns, starting with the center portion of the steel plate 410, moving to first side portion of the steel plate 420, and then to a second side portion of the steel plate as shown in FIG. 4. The weave patterns produced may be as shown in FIG. 4 before switching over to a cover pass (or seam weld) welding the seam across the full width of the steel plate as also shown in FIG. 4. This multiple pass pattern improves the weld process by first using a weave to bridge any gaps where steel plates meet before the final cover pass. The weave passes also heat the steel plate before the final cover pass, which uses more wire and heat to penetrate the steel plate, thereby strengthening the weld seam so that the continuous steel plate can move through the process without breaking or otherwise becoming misaligned.

In order for the material to move at a more constant speed throughout the heating process there is a timed pressure relief at both the entry 302 and exit 304 pinch rolls, which will allow

the welded seam to pass through the pinch rolls without slowing the material speed. This is achieved by the welding robot sending a pulse signal to the pinch roll control system once it has completed its weld sequence. This pulse signal will tell the pinch roll control system to start counting the distance the material travels utilizing the encoder wheel on the pinch roll motor. As the welded seam travels down the line, the pinch rolls will relieve pressure once the welded seam reaches each pinch roll. This reduced pressure will allow the welded seam to roll through the pinch roll without stalling or slowing the line speed. The pinch rolls do not open or lift off the material, but does have a secondary pressure setting which reduces the pressure applied by the pinch rolls and therefore allows the weld to roll through the pinch rolls. This system has been installed with each setting having adjustability to achieve desired performance. The following settings can be adjusted: primary pinch roll pressure; secondary pinch roll pressure; distance from the welding robot to the entry pinch rolls; distance from entry to exit pinch roll; and the distance the material travels or window while the pressure is relieved.

The heat treatment unit **300** may include one or more preheat induction coils **301**, a set of entrance pinch rolls **302**, which guide the steel plate to be treated through one or more induction heat coils **310**, a quench head **320**, and a quench media removal unit **330**, until the intermediate treated steel article to be formed from the starting steel plate is received by a set of exit pinch rolls **304**. Similarly, the exit pinch rolls **304** serve to guide the steel plate through the induction tempering coil **340** and onto the exit conveyor **240**. Optionally, both the entrance pinch rolls **302** and the exit pinch rolls **304** may contain spaced circumferential grooves, preferably equally spaced, corresponding to the spaced welds along the width of the steel plates. Such circumferential grooves provide relief into which any material built up during the welding operation may be recessed as the welded portion of the steel plates pass between the pinch rolls **302** and **304**.

Before entering the entrance pinch rolls **302**, the steel plate may be preheated in a preheat induction coil **301** while moving along the conveyor **200**. The pre-heat power supply may be set, for example, to turn on 75 seconds after starting movement of the steel plate through the conveyor **200**. At a conveyor speed of up to 75 inches per minute (1.9 m/min), this involves moving along the conveyor up to 7.8 ft (2.4 m). Once on, the pre-heat power supply **360** may start at 1% and ramp up 0.5-10% per second until it reaches a final power setting of below 120% of the power of the preheat induction coil. This ramp up involves the steel plate moving another four to five feet of travel along the conveyor **200** before the pre-heat power supply reaches a operating power level where the steel plate may reach a temperature of not more than 815° C. (1500° F.) across the width of the steel plate. Alternatively, the steel plate may reach a temperature of up to 704° C. (1300° F.). The ramp up procedure for the power supply allows substantially evenly and gradually heating the steel plate through induction heating and aids in controlling the shape and flatness of the steel plate with gradual heating to above 800° C. (1472° F.) before entry the rapid heating sequence upon entry pinch rolls **302**. Alternatively, the plate is preheated to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.). The steel may be preheated at a rate of 9-40° F./sec (522° C./sec).

The steel plates to be treated pass through the entrance pinch rolls **302** and through one or more induction heating coils or an inductor **310** which is powered by a power supply **315**. The one or more induction heating coils **310** may be encased in concrete or other non-conductive material in order to reduce damage to the induction coils as much as possible

and reduce misaligned steel plates from passing through the coils, although non-encased induction heating coils may also be provided. As the steel plate to be treated passes through the induction heating coils **310**, an eddy current is induced in the steel plate, and it is the resistance of the steel material in conjunction with the eddy currents which heat the material. Given the configuration of the induction coils **310**, the shape of the steel plate passing through the coil, and the speed at which the steel plate is moving through the heating coil, the steel material is heated to a temperature of between 800° C. and 1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in ten seconds or less. Alternatively, the steel plate may be heated by the heating coil to the same peak temperature range in forty seconds or less, or still further, in twenty seconds or less, as desired.

The induction heating may be accomplished by providing a number of induction heating coils in a series so that the steel plate passes under each coil sequentially. According to one embodiment, each individual induction heating coil may have a width of approximately 4 inches (102 mm). Alternatively, the induction heating coil is an austenizing coil having a width of 8". In one series arrangement, between 1 and 5 heating coils each having a width of 4" (102 mm) are provided, providing a heating coil assembly having a width between 4 inches and 20 inches (102-508 mm). At a travel rate of approximately 40-75 inches per minute (1.0-1.8 m/min), the steel may take between 3.2 and 30 seconds to completely pass through the induction heating coils.

The induction heaters may have a ramp-up heating profile for heating the steel plate. This may be accomplished by providing each induction heating coil at a set temperature, providing a heating cycle for each induction heating coil, or other means of rapidly increasing the temperature of the steel plate to a peak temperature range of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.).

Following rapid induction heating, the heated steel plate is held at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds as it travels to the quenching operation. Alternatively, the heated steel plate may travel for between two and ten seconds. During this time, no additional heat or other energy may be imparted to the steel plate, other than to maintain temperature; nor is the steel plate subjected to any cooling method, other than exposure to the ambient atmosphere other than to maintain temperature. For purposes of this disclosure, such time period is referred to as holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range, although it is expected that the steel plate will cool slightly during this period as it is no longer being heated by the induction heater **310**. According to a further embodiment, the heated steel composition may be held at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds. Alternatively, the heated steel composition may be held at the peak temperature range for between two and thirty seconds.

The heated steel plate then is subjected to a quenching operation as it passes through a quench head **320** where a quench medium is flowed over the steel plate at a rate of up to 900 gallons per minute (3400 L/min). The quenching operation decreases the temperature of the steel plate from the peak temperature range of between 800° C. and 1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) to a temperature below 177° C. (350° F.), and may be from 38° C. (100° F.) to 427° C. (800° F.) at a temperature reduction rate of between 200° C. per second and 3000° C. per second (360-5400° F./sec). The heated steel composition may be reduced to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds. The quench medium, which in one instance may be water, is recycled through a quench media storage tank **325** located adjacent the heat treatment unit **300**. In addition to

water, other quench media capable of achieving temperature reduction rates of 200-3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec) may also be employed.

While little quench media will remain on the steel plate following quenching, it is desirable to reduce, if not eliminate, any residual quench media on the steel plate prior to induction tempering by techniques such as mechanical wiping, or forced air blowing, either alone or in combination. Accordingly, a quench medium reduction unit **330** is provided in the heat treatment unit **300** following the quench head **320**. The quench medium reduction unit **330** may include wipers **332**, air knives **334**, and other drying apparatuses, either alone or in combination, so as to reduce the residual quench media on the steel plate prior to induction tempering. As the leading edge portions of the quenched steel plate passes through the quench medium reduction unit, the steel plate enters the exit pinch rolls **304**, which serve to guide the steel plate through the induction tempering coil **340** and onto the exit conveyor **240**. Optionally, both the entrance pinch rolls **302** and the exit pinch rolls **304** may contain spaced circumferential grooves, preferably equally spaced corresponding to the spaced welds along the width of the steel plates. Such circumferential grooves may provide relief into which any material built up during the welding operation may be recessed as the welded portion of the steel plate passes between the pinch rolls **302** or **304**. The quenching step is performed in more than 1 second and not more than 20 seconds.

After the residual quench media has been removed from the steel plate, the steel plate is then passed through an induction tempering coil **340** to reduce any internal stresses that may have been introduced during quenching. As with the induction heating coil **310**, the induction tempering coil **340** may optionally be encased in concrete or other non-conductive material in order to minimize damage to the coil as possible misaligned steel plates passes through the coil.

During the tempering step, the steel plate to form the steel article is heated to a temperature between 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.) and tempered for a period less than ninety minutes. Alternatively, the steel article may be heated to a temperature between 100° C. and 427° C. (212-800° F.) for less than ninety minutes. Three methods of tempering are contemplated. In a conventional oven tempering process, the steel article is heated to the desired temperature for less than 90 minutes and preferably less than 30 minutes. In an induction tempering process, the steel article is heated to the temperature range for less than 10 minutes and preferably less than 2 minutes. The tempering process may be as short as between 1 and 20 seconds at between 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.). In a combination induction and conventional oven tempering process, the steel article may be heated to the desired temperature for less than 60 minutes and preferably more than 30 minutes. As with the induction heating coil **310**, the induction tempering coil **340** is powered by its own distinct power supply, i.e. induction tempering coil power supply **345**, located proximate the heat treatment system **100**. Following tempering, the tempered steel plate is then discharged onto the exit conveyor **240**, which is provided with a cutting device **230**.

The cutting device **230** may be a plasma torch, an oxy-fuel torch, or other cutting apparatus which may be affixed to an articulated robotic arm configured to cut the moving steel plate into desired lengths as the plate travels down the exit conveyor **240**. A plasma cutting robot **230** may have two cutting and vision programs within its main program. At the start of each run, the vision system **235** seeks the front edge of the steel plate. Once the front edge is detected, the cutting

robot **230** utilizes an encoder wheel that counts the steel plate movement along the conveyor **240** and makes lead rip cuts at steel plate lengths. After the program has made one lead cut, the vision system programs identifies a welded seam and the plasma robot **230** cuts the steel plate on that seam across its width, and then waits, tracking the steel plate movement along the conveyor with the encoder wheel to make another lead rip cut before switching back to the vision system to identify the next welded seam and making the next cut. This process continues for the duration of a run as steel plate is cut into substantially rectangular lengths at least at the seams while the steel plate continuously moves along the conveyor. In one example, the steel plate may be cut into four feet (1.2 m) wide by ten feet (3.0 m) long segments, although other lengths and widths may also be desirable depending upon the ultimate application for the steel article.

Following cutting, the tempered steel plate is air cooled as it passes down the exit conveyor to reach a temperature of less than 100° C. (212° F.). The steel articles may then be stacked into a stack by a stacker **250** and subsequently transported to another location.

Following heat treatment and quenching as described above, the mechanical properties of the steel article may be tailored to desired specifications by changing the tempering temperature of the process between 100° C. and 704° C. (212° F.-1300° F.). According to one embodiment the tempered steel composition may have at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight and a yield strength of at least 160 ksi (1100 MPa) and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

As shown in FIG. 6, we have found an indirect relationship between tensile strength and tempering temperature. For example, tempering at 260° C. (500° F.) resulted in tensile strength of 260.5 ksi (1796 MPa), while tempering at 200° C. (392° F.) resulted in a tensile strength of 275.3 ksi (1898 MPa), a difference of 14.8 ksi (102 MPa) or approximately 5%. Turning to FIG. 9, the relationship between percent elongation and tempering temperature is indicated. Notably, increasing the tempering temperature from 200° C. to 220° C. (392-428° F.) decreased the percent elongation of the treated steel samples, but further increases in the tempering temperature increased the percentage of elongation at 260° C. (500° F.) tempering temperature was the same as the percentage of elongation observed in the sample tempered at 204° C. (400° F.).

The ductility was evaluated again after induction tempering at temperatures between 204° C. and 260° C. (400-500° F.) using a test method based on the ASTM E-8 method for ductility determination. In this method the ductility measurement, designated as the percentage of area reduction, is represented as the ratio of the cross-sectional area of the sample at the tensile break to the original cross-sectional area times 100. Thus, a lower percentage represents an increased amount of ductility. The 204° C. (400° F.) and 260° C. (500° F.) temper annealed samples, represented in FIGS. 6 and 7, show that in contrast to the percent elongation measured during the tensile testing there was a direct relationship between the temper temperature and the percentage in area reduction, i.e., tempering at 260° C. (500° F.) temperatures resulted a lower percentage in area reduction (58.6%) than tempering at 204° C. (400° F.) (69.7% area reduction).

The steel article formed and treated by the disclosed method may be employed in armor applications. In particular, the steel article formed and treated by the disclosed method has also been subjected to ballistics testing according to standards set forth in MIL-DTL-32332, MIL-DTL-46100E, MIL-DTL-12560J (classes 1 and 4), as well as NIJ threat level 3. The results from such ballistics testing of the steel article

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are tabulated in Table 1. The results show comparison of a 0.25 inch (6.35 mm) thick sample of AISI 4130 steel treated by the presently disclosed method compared to other standard materials used in armor applications.

TABLE 1

Material	Thickness (inches)	(V50 protection ballistic limit (fps))	
		.030-cal M2AP @ 30 deg.	20 mm FSP @ 0 deg.
4130 Steel Treated By Disclosed Process	0.250	2461	1800
RHA 360 Hb	0.250	2100	1544
HighHard 500Hb	0.250	2300-2400	<1500 est.
5083 Al	0.733	—	1200
5059 Al	0.733	1840	1200
MgAz31B-H24	1.125	No Data	1300
Ti—6Al—4V	0.444	No Data	1550

For purposes of this disclosure, the V_{50} protection ballistic limit is defined as the average of six fair impact velocities comprising the three lowest velocities resulting in complete penetration and the three highest velocities resulting in partial penetration of the test specimen, as further explained in MIL-DTL-32332 and MIL-DTL-46100E (MR) with Amendment 1 of 24 Oct. 2008, which is incorporated by reference in its entirety herein. Table 1 shows that steel plate formed and treated by the presently disclosed method exhibits V_{50} values which are the same as or exceed V_{50} values for the comparative materials of similar thickness. As such, it may be possible to use a relatively thinner cladding of steel plate formed and treated by the current method to achieve at least the same level of ballistic protection. Therefore, the weight of a vehicle clad with steel articles treated by the disclosed method may be relatively lighter as compared to vehicles clad with the comparative armor materials. Thus, steel articles formed and treated by the present method may result in relatively improved fuel economy, transportability, maneuverability, and other benefits of a generally lighter weight vehicle. Such

data is summarized below in Table 2, which shows the thickness in inches required for each of the tested steel plate to achieve passing ballistics results for a 2100 feet per second (640 m/s) projectile and the corresponding pounds per square foot for each armor material for the required thicknesses. According to various embodiments of the invention, the V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle is at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm)

TABLE 2

Material	10.2 psf V50 in fps	10.2 psf Thickness
4130 Steel Treated By Disclosed Process	2255	0.250"

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TABLE 2-continued

Material	10.2 psf V50 in fps	10.2 psf Thickness
RHA 360 Hb	1700	0.250"
HighHard 500Hb	1640	0.250"
5083 Al	1625	0.733"
5059 Al	1675 (est)	.0733"
MgAz31B-H24	1650	1.125"
Ti—6Al—4V	1910	0.444"

The microstructure of steel article has a direct relationship on the mechanical properties. Accordingly, the microstructure of the steel specimens formed and treated by the disclosed method were also examined, both before and after heat treatment. FIG. 5 shows the initial microstructure of the starting material for the steel article prior to treatment is ferrite and pearlite. Following formation and treatment by the disclosed method, the microstructure of the steel article may be 80 percent or more martensite and up to 5 percent bainite by weight, and may approach 100 percent martensite by weight. The microstructure of the steel article includes less than 5% bainite (by weight) and may include less than 1% bainite (by weight), or as little as trace amounts. FIGS. 11 and 12 show the microstructure of steel article formed and tempered at 260° C. (500° F.) as described above after nital etching at 500 and 1000 times magnification, respectively. Similarly, FIGS. 13 and 14 show the microstructure of steel article formed and tempered at 204° C. (400° F.) after nital etching at 500 and 1000 times magnification, respectively. In both instances, the analysis shows that the microstructure of the samples of the steel article consisted of almost entirely of martensite.

The above-described process can also be used to produce high hard steel and ultra-high hard steel by the inclusion of nickel in the provided steel composition. The amount of nickel may range from 0-4.5%, wherein greater proportions of nickel increases the ductility of the steel product. The high hard and ultra high hard steel products may include yield strengths as shown below in Table 3, wherein various tensile properties are shown.

TABLE 3

	Average Yield Strength	Yield Strength Range	Average Ultimate Strength	Ultimate Strength Range
High Hard	190 ksi	160-205 ksi	240 ksi	210-255 ksi
Ultra High Hard	230 ksi	210-250 ksi	325 ksi	300-345 ksi
High Hard	1310 MPa	1103-1413 MPa	1655 MPa	1448-1758 MPa
Ultra High Hard	1586 MPa	1448-1724 MPa	2241 MPa	2068-2379 MPa

While the invention has been described with reference to certain embodiments it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

- providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

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carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
 silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
 nickel less than 4.5%,
 molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 sulfur less than 0.040%,
 phosphorus less than 0.035%,
 balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature from 100° C. to 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

2. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 1 where the air cooled steel composition has a V₅₀ protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

3. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 1, where the air cooled steel composition has a microstructure having no more than 1% bainite by weight.

4. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
 silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
 nickel less than 4.5%,
 molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 sulfur less than 0.040%,
 phosphorus less than 0.035%,
 balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);

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(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition; and

(g) air cooling the steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

5. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 4 where the air cooled steel composition has a V₅₀ protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).

6. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inch (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
 silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
 nickel less than 4.5%,
 molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 sulfur less than 0.040%,
 phosphorus less than 0.035%,
 balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 815° C. (1500° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;

(g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature between 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and

(h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

7. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 6, where the air cooled steel composition has a microstructure having no more than 1% bainite by weight.

8. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,

carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%,
 silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
 nickel less than 4.5%,
 molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 sulfur less than 0.040%,
 phosphorus less than 0.035%,
 balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

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- (b) preheating the provided steel composition to a temperature to not more than 815° C. (1500° F.);
 - (c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature of between 800° C. (1472° F.) and 1150° C. (2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;
 - (d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;
 - (e) quenching the heated steel composition from the peak temperature range to below 100° C. (212° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec);
 - (f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;
 - (g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature from 100° C. to 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and
 - (h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) to form a steel article having at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.
9. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 8, where the air cooled steel composition has a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).
10. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 8, where the air cooled steel composition has a microstructure having no more than 1% of bainite by weight.
11. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:
- (a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inches (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,
 - carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%
 - silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 - manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 - chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,
 - nickel less than 4.5%,
 - molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 - sulfur less than 0.040%,
 - phosphorus less than 0.035%,
 - balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;
 - (b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);
 - (c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;
 - (d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;
 - (e) quenching the heated steel composition to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;
 - (f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition;
 - (g) tempering the quenched steel composition at a temperature between 100° C. and 704° C. (212-1300° F.) for less than ninety minutes; and
 - (h) air cooling the tempered steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.
12. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the air cooled steel composition has a microstructure having no more than 1% bainite by weight.

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13. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the air cooled tempered steel composition has a V_{50} protection ballistic limit at 30° obliquity angle at least 2300 feet per second (701 m/s) with a .30 caliber armor piercing round for a thickness of 0.25 inches (6.35 mm).
14. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the steel composition is heated in step (c) in less than twenty seconds.
15. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the heated steel composition is held at the peak temperature range for between two and twenty seconds.
16. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the heated steel composition is quenched from the peak temperature range to below 177° C. (350° F.) at a temperature rate reduction of between 200 and 3000° C./sec (360-5400° F./sec).
17. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the residual quench media is removed from the surface of the quenched steel composition by at least one of mechanical wiping, blown air, and combinations thereof.
18. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the tempering step is performed using a conventional oven.
19. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the tempering step is performed using a combination of a conventional oven and an induction heater.
20. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the tempering step is performed at between 100° C. (212° F.) and 427° C. (800° F.).
21. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11 further comprising the step of, prior to heating the steel composition, welding together two lengths of steel plate along the width with one or more welds to form a continuous series of steel plates.
22. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 21 where the step of welding includes applying a weave weld bridging between lengths of steel plate across the width of the steel plates.
23. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 22, with the step of welding includes applying a weave weld bridging between lengths of steel plate in three sections where the center portion of steel plate is done first and the side portions are welded to provide a weave weld across the width of the steel plates.
24. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 23, where in addition a seam weld is applied over the weave weld across the width of the steel plates.
25. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 21, where in addition a seam weld is applied over the weave weld across the width of the steel plates.
26. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 21, where an indicia is applied to the steel plate in advance of the welding step to enable a vision system to identify the location of end portions of lengths of the steel plates for the welding step.
27. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the heating step is performed using an induction heater.
28. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the quenching step is performed by flowing a quench medium over the steel article at a rate of up to 900 gallons/min (3400 L/min).
29. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 28, where the quench medium is water.
30. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 28, where the quenching step is performed in more than 1 second and not more than 20 seconds.

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31. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 28, where after at least step (g) the steel plate is cut into lengths at least at the seams while the steel plate continuously moves along the conveyor.

32. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the tempering step is performed using an induction heater.

33. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11 where the tempering step is performed at between 100° C. (212° F.) and 704° C. (1300° F.) in a time between 1 and 20 seconds.

34. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the steel composition has, by weight, carbon between 0.25 and 0.40%.

35. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 11, where the steel composition has, by weight, carbon between 0.40 and 0.55%.

36. A method for treating a steel article to form a high yield strength and ductile alloy comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a steel composition having a material thickness no greater than 0.5 inch (12.7 mm), having an initial microstructure of at least ferrite and pearlite, and having a composition of, by weight,
 - carbon between 0.25 and 0.55%
 - silicon between 0.15 and 0.35%,
 - manganese between 0.40 and 1.0%,
 - chromium between 0.40 and 1.10%,

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nickel less than 4.5%,
molybdenum between 0.15 and 0.35%,
sulfur less than 0.040%,
phosphorus less than 0.035%,
balance iron and other elements and compounds in making steel;

(b) preheating the provided steel composition to not more than 594° C. (1100° F.);

(c) heating the preheated steel composition to a peak temperature between 800-1150° C. (1472-2102° F.) in less than forty seconds;

(d) holding the heated steel composition at the peak temperature range for between two and sixty seconds;

(e) quenching the heated steel composition to below 177° C. (350° F.) in less than four seconds;

(f) removing residual quench media from the surface of the quenched steel composition; and

(h) air cooling the steel composition to less than 100° C. (212° F.) having a transformed microstructure of at least 80% martensite and up to 5% bainite by weight, a yield strength of at least 160 Ksi (1100 MPa), and a total elongation between 5% and 22%.

37. The method for treating a steel article as claimed in claim 36, where the air cooled steel composition has a microstructure having no more than 1% bainite, by weight.

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